

SOCIAL SERVICES RENDERED TO SPECIAL CHILDREN BY DAY STAR, AN ORGANIZATION RUN BY ST.ANNE'S SISTERS OF TIRUCHIRAPPALLI

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ABSTRACT

St. Anne's Congregation, Trichirapalli (SAT), a religious institution founded by a widow Mother Annamma, always grounded in providing the best care to people in utmost need since its inception in 1858. SAT also realized the need to cater special services to specially-abled children. Hence, SAT came up with four special schools to provide both educational and vocational training to physically and mentally impaired children in Theni district. The training given by them, focus to improve social skills, general motor development and counseling the parents to support their children to face the world in a better way.

KEYWORDS: SAT, Special School, Specially abled children, Education & Training

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INTRODUCTION

In this study, I have attempted to prove that special children also can do all the works through training. This article is also to appreciate the work being done by the St. Anne's Congregation Trichirappalli for the welfare of the Special Children. Bringing this to light will help the people get more benefit from the SAT. School for Intellectually challenged children or Special School, renders service to the visually impaired, hearing impaired, mobility impaired and intellectually challenged children. In Theni District, these schools were started and run by the St. Anne's Congregation, Trichirapalli (SAT). This religious institution was started in 1858 A.D, by a widow, Mother Annamma. She had inherited a sound spiritual patrimony, based on the Eucharist and the Word of God, initiated the Congregation and rendering service to those who were in utmost need. "Commitment to the cause of the socially marginalized" was the basis of the principal charisma of the Founder, Mother Annamma. The SAT set its foot in Theni District at the beginning of the Twentieth Century and has gained its strength through all these years.[1]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methods, followed in this study, are historical as well as sociological. By applying the historical methodology, the education, imparted by the St. Anne's Sisters, Trichirapalli, through their Special Schools is explained. Their structure, work strategies, enrollment and financial assistance are studied, by using the interview method. Field visit is also used by the Researcher. The unconventional methods of oral history, participatory research and observation are used.

The St. Anne's Congregation of Trichirapalli is an ordinary religious group that puts out its helping hands, to uplift the downtrodden comprising of young widows. It set its foot in Theni District at the beginning of the Twentieth Century and has gained its strength through all these years. Until recently, the area remained educationally, socially and economically backwards, a hotbed of communal clashes, casteism, illiteracy, pervading

superstition, dowry deaths, honour killing, female infanticide and more

Special School

Special School is a school for children, who are unable to benefit from ordinary schooling because they have learning or physical disabilities. Special education is the practice of educating students, with special educational needs, in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs. Ideally, this process involves the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adapted equipment and materials, and accessible settings. These interventions are designed to help individuals, with special needs, achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in school and in their community. This special intervention may not be available if the students were only given access to typical classroom education. Common special needs include learning disabilities, communication disorders, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities and developmental disabilities. Students, with these kinds of special needs, are likely to benefit from additional educational services such as different approaches to teaching, the use of technology and a specifically adapted teaching area. The first special school, in the world, was the Institute National *des Jeunes Aveugles*, in Paris, which was founded in 1874. [2]

Realizing the importance of educating the special children, SAT established nineteen Special Schools and Rehabilitation Centres, to render service ministry to the mentally challenged children, by providing Special Education and Training. Among these nineteen schools, four schools were established in Theni District. They were Day Star, Lucy Crescentia Special School, Early Intervention Centre in Periyakulam, and Annai Annamma Special School, in Royappanpatti. Children with mental retardation, low vision with mental retardation, autism, cerebral palsy with mental retardation, were admitted to these schools. Day Star served as the centre for all these Schools.

Day Star

St. Anne's Day Star, Special School, at Periyakulam, run by St. Anne's Rural Women Development Education and Empowerment Programme - SARWODEEP, for the mentally challenged children (above six years), to promote self-help and make them equipped with the very basic needs to run their daily routine. It is established to address the needs of mentally challenged children, in Periyakulam and adjoining villages, in Theni District.[3] As there is no special school in these villages, to support these kinds of children with special needs and their families, Sisters of St. Anne of Trichirapalli launched this special school, to train and rehabilitate the special children.[4] It is three km from Periyakulam bus stand and situated at four furlongs, from the National Highways 45, extension. This daycare center educates mentally challenged children (six to fifteen years), and there are thirty children. The purpose of the school is to provide training to mentally challenged children to help them, to manage motor activities and prepare them to the vocational level. This training prepares the children to move, attend to their personal daily needs, be able to learn a vocational skill and generate an income and support them, and lessen their family burden. The school vehicle picks up the children, from their homes, in the morning and drops them at their residence in the evening. Lunch is provided by the Sisters in the school itself. The children are being trained and educated, based on the individual child needs and requirements, that are assessed by using the MDPS (Madras Developmental Programming System) Scales. The children are being classified into four types as mild, moderate, profound and slow learners, based on their understanding, cognitive development, and the environment. Preprimary, Primary, Secondary and Prevocational training are given to them. The workers appointed in this School are, one Special Teacher, one Physio-Therapist, one Vocational Instructor, one Caretaker, and one Helper.[5]

Training Methods

During the morning hours, the children are trained to learn academic skills like reading, writing, self-help skills, besides undergoing physiotherapy and yoga exercises. In afternoon hours, they are given training in Individualized Educational Programming. This programme consists of co-curricular activities, through dance, drama, speech, hand works, garden works, games, skating, stitching, art from wastes, singing and helping the child to find out his / her inherent talents, and potentials.[6]

Early Intervention Centre for Mentally Retarded Children, Periyakulam

Early Intervention Centre was established, by the SAT, in Periyakulam, in the year 2010, for children below six years, with disabilities.[7] Developmental impairment is a common problem in a child's health, that occurs in approximately ten percent of the childhood population and even more among 'at risk' children, discharged from the sick, newborn care unit. Children, disabled or non-disabled, under six years of age, represent a rapidly growing segment in India. Children, with disabilities, are often denied access to appropriate services. According to the National Sample Survey Organization, the total number of the disabled population, in India, is approximately 1.85 crores and the actual estimates may be higher. The idea, behind the early intervention, is to intervene early and minimize disability. Once the disability is already established, then the intervention would include enhancement of child development, to reach the highest potential for the child possible and prevent progression to handicap, that may arise from activity limitation. Research has proved that the period, from birth to six years, is the most critical years for all children. This is especially true for children, with developmental delay.

Early identification and early intervention programmes can significantly improve the quality of their lives. Such programmes will work, towards these children achieving their maximum potential and thereby, promoting their inclusion into the mainstream. The importance of early intervention can never be over emphasized. In the postnatal years, the growth and development of the child are, at their greatest, in the first two or three years. It is during this first phase of cognitive development when the underpinnings of intelligence and behaviour begin to evolve. Additionally, plasticity, the ability of the brain to affect structural and functional changes, caused by external and internal influences, is at its peak, during this period from birth to two years. The malleability of the developing brain, at this stage, makes it possible to bring about these changes. If the child misses this opportunity, further learning will be slow or inadequate. Developmental intervention requires an interdisciplinary approach by a multidisciplinary team, placed under one roof. However, there are very few Centres in India, which provide such services and even these centres do not have all the components, required for evaluation and intervention, in a holistic way.[8]

The functions of the Early Intervention Centre for the Mentally Retarded Children at Periyakulam, are the identification of retardation, detecting the levels, segregating the children, depending upon their needs, so as to train them individually and in groups, by the special educators and the therapists effectively, at the earlier stages of growth and development of the child. The children are helped to learn and become trained at the Centre, cultivate personal habits or life help skills viz. eating, grooming, dressing, toileting, time sense, things sensing, colour sensing, identify the letters, alphabets, numerals, simple words and also opportunities to have physical exercises to shape their physical mobility.[9]

The age group of the children, who are admitted at this early intervention Centre, is from zero years to six years. This enables the children to have training and education, at their earlier stages of growth and development. There are twenty five children at the Centre now and they are trained and looked after properly. There are two special educators, one

part-time therapist and two caregivers, to look after the training cum education of the children. Accessories like identity cards for differently abled children, free bus with escort and monthly grant, are all offered to them. The Government of Tamil Nadu, Department of Rehabilitation at Chennai, have approved the establishment of two Early Intervention Centres for Mentally Retarded Children in Theni District, with twenty five children in each of them, with five staff members, to take care of and to train the children. One among them is maintained by SARWODEEP (St.Anne's Rural Women Development Education and Empowerment Programme).[10]

Lucy Crecentia Special School cum Vocational Training Centre

The need for the opening and running of another Special School, for the Special Children (cerebral palsy, and mentally retarded), was felt when the daycare center children became older and required more training and education. Hence the special school was opened in December 2013.[11] Now there are fifty children in the school. There are two teachers, one physiotherapist and two caretakers to look after and train these fifty children, with special needs. This is a day school that trains, educates the children, with special needs, according to their IQ, stages of retardation, the need of the child and the level of comprehension of the child, by the special educators, and therapists at the school. Parents are also being oriented to do the follow up at home when the child is with the parents so as to facilitate and speed up the development of the child. While the younger children are segregated into primary and secondary schools, the older children are being given vocational training, in making paper cups, making paper envelopes, doing hand works, bookbinding, to help them to earn. The children, in the age group of six to eighteen years, are placed in the Lucy Crecentia Special School cum vocational training center.

Training for the Special Teachers

With the support of the Government, Maduram Narayanan Training Centre at Chennai, conducted a two-day residential refresher programme, for special teachers, in South Tamil Nadu. Thirty special teachers participated from Theni, Viruthunagar, Nellai, Ramnad, Sivagangai, and Kanyakumari Districts. SARWODEEP had accommodated the special teachers and resource persons for the two-day training. The training was given in new methods of teaching, experimental study, play way method of teaching, and practice for the demonstration.[12]

Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme

This programme was implemented with the support of the Management of Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women in Periyakulam of Theni District in Periyakulam Municipality. Thirty two volunteers, from five town panchayats and eighteen village panchayats of Periyakulam Block, were identified and recruited to provide training and motivation to take up the works intensively.

Under this programme, three special camps to screen and assess the disabled persons, were organized in the target areas. 1961 persons were identified and they were all given ID cards and twenty persons among them were given monthly maintenance grants. During the second camp, 578 persons, with disability, were given assistive devices such as calipers, wheelchairs, tricycles and hearing aids and MR children were offered kits, shoes, and the like. Due to the efforts of the team members, one daycare center, for special children, was established in Jeyamangalam Government Higher Secondary School premises, after surveying and identifying the special children in the nearby areas. It is functioning with eighteen disabled children, under the guidance of a special educator and helper. Under home-based care interventions, twenty eight children were selected, trained and also given annual maintenance of Rs.1000 per head per annum. Rs.28,000 was

distributed to them. In order to assess the disability magnitude and address the persons with disability needs, health checks and assessment camps were organized at Periyakulam Block, in Theni District.[13]

Annai Annamma Special School

Annai Annamma Special School was started in response to the need for a special school for special children (Cerebral Palsy, and mentally retarded) in Royappanpatti. In 2011 Sr. Maria Alphonsal took efforts to start this Special School when she was the Mother Provincial in Maria Province. Her efforts come into effect in 2012. Children, in the age group of six to eighteen years, were admitted to this School. Now there are thirty children - sixteen girls and fourteen boys, in the School. There are two special teachers, one physiotherapist and four caretakers, to look after and train these thirty children, with special needs. This is a day school, functioning from 9 a.m to 4 p.m. It trains and educates children, with special needs, according to their IQ, stages of retardation, the need of the child, the level of comprehension of the child, by special educators and therapists at the schools. Parents are also being oriented to do follow up at home when the child is with the parents, to facilitate and speed up the development of the child. While children are segregated into pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools, elder children are being given vocational training in making paper cups, making paper envelopes, doing hand works, bookbinding. The children are trained to earn.[14] This School is registered under Section 52 of the Persons with Disabilities. The Government sanctioned recognition to this school, in the year 2015, on the basis of Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act1995.[15]

CONCLUSIONS

These children are being given skill training in the preparation of toilet cleaning liquids, washing and cleaning powders, incense sticks, and assist workers in the printing press. The parents of the special children, mostly the mothers, are given orientation, sensitization on the needs of their children, need for follow-up exercises, training, and while at their homes, to ensure better growth and development. During the under review, the parents were trained and sensitized through orientation programmes on the child development, growth, muscles and motor development, role of parents in training the children successfully and also in regular intervals, according to the requirements of the programme. Students celebrated common functions along with the teachers. They learnt many social skills, through participation, in those functions. Parents - teachers meetings are convened in the Day Star. From 2003 onwards, nearly a hundred children were admitted to this school. Forty-six children have left the school after getting the necessary training.

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